

# PLESIOSAURUS PROSPECTS LOOKING UP

A NUMBER of public spirited citizens of Argentina," said a recent dispatch from Buenos Ayres, "have contributed sufficient funds to finance the expedition." The expedition, of course, is that now on its way back to its lair the presumed plesiosaurus, which has been reported by hunters to be lurking around in a sub-Andean lake in Patagonia.

How aptly are the financing citizens termed "public spirited." Indeed, they are all of that. Their service is world-wide. Their generosity tends to increase the scope of human imagination, which of late years has been so narrowed and confined, drawn and quartered and cut and dried as to be almost charged off as a dead debt. What with everything so pre-determined, so pre-digested and so pooh-poohed, the citizens may be credited with the highest type of mental philanthropy in their efforts to prove that it is not only the unexpected but the "impossible" that happens.

And the expedition stands to win either way. If it finds a plesiosaurus or something equally odd and prehistoric, fascinating vistas will be opened to the fancy. After that, who could say what fearful and wonderful creatures the out-of-the-way and inaccessible corners of the world might hold? The makers of maps again could decorate their charts with peaceful and delightful monsters, which they were wont to sprinkle about the unexplored quarters of the globe, and who could deny their right? Travel and exploration would take a new lease on life and scientists would shrink from being in the least dogmatic. Bigger adventures on the verge of a wilderness would plunge in, exclaiming: "Well, naturally history and the guide books say there's a stegosaurus or a diplodocus in these parts for millions of years, but [hopefully] after that plesiosaurus down there in Patagonia, you never can tell!"

On the other hand, if the expedition doesn't find a trace of plesiosaurus that does not go to prove the lake is plesiosaurus-less; that is no evidence there is no such animal. Any variety of things may have happened to the creature. He may be hiding out on the expedition. He may have moved to another lake, if there is no sub-Andean lake shortage. He may have sunk without a trace. It must be remembered that it was hunters who reported the great marine lizard. If fishermen had told the story, spreading out their arms in a vain attempt to measure the thirty feet of length of the plesiosaurus that got away, there would be a great deal more room for doubt.

No, you can't say there is no plesiosaurus, fit survival though it would be. As Dr. William D. Hornaday, of the Bronx Zoological Park, said the other day, it is dangerous to make an assertion that covers the whole world. "So many seemingly impossible things have been discovered in my own time," he declared, "that it makes a fellow stop and not say 'It can't be.'"

Gelett Burgess, for instance, had never seen a purple cow and never hoped to see one. And yet for the last couple of decades he might have seen a purple okapi, which no one ever had hoped to see before. The okapi is just as much of a ruminant mammal as the cow. Its sides and face are puce, its neck and body purplish and its limbs are transversely barred with black and white. It has a long and mobile muzzle and blends with the forest. Can you meet it without breaking the Eighteenth Amendment? It is only since 1901 that travelers in Central Africa have been able to describe the okapi they have seen without being greeted with bursts of raucous laughter and exposing their veracity and sobriety to serious question.

Among other zoological oddities accepted as authentic in the last forty years or so, Dr. Hornaday mentioned the Alaskan brown bear, the great panda or parti-colored bear of the mountains of western China, the pygmy hippopotamus and the dwarf elephant in the wilds of Central Africa and the Australian lung fish, which has a traceable genealogy of about forty million years.

It seems that the lung fish was one of the movement inaugurated in that period of antiquity to take air straight and without water, thus losing a status as fish and becoming amphibians. Apparently the lung fish hesitated and was saved, for after taking the air it went no further and was spared by evolution.

"The late Carl Hagenbeck once told me of a strange black and white wild horse," Dr. Hornaday remarked, "which natives had told him roamed the Gobi Desert in southern Mongolia. He never completed his plans to hunt it. But I believe it's there."

"The ribbon seal is a strange animal found in Baffin Lake, in the interior of the Alaskan peninsula. A landslide would make that lake land-locked, and thus a marine creature might be found under conditions strictly analogous to those under which the plesiosaurus was reported."

"The remains of large animals such as the mylodon and the megalotherium have been found in South America. The attitude to be taken toward the plesiosaurus is this:

**Before Patagonia Won Its Recent Prominence by Asserting It Could "Summon Spirits From the Vasty Deep" of a Sub-Andean Lake, Other Remote Corners of the World Had Reported Prehistoric Monsters Present Though Unaccounted For. South America Has Superseded Africa as the Dark Continent With a Dark Past. Africa's Big Mystery Is a Brontosaurus**

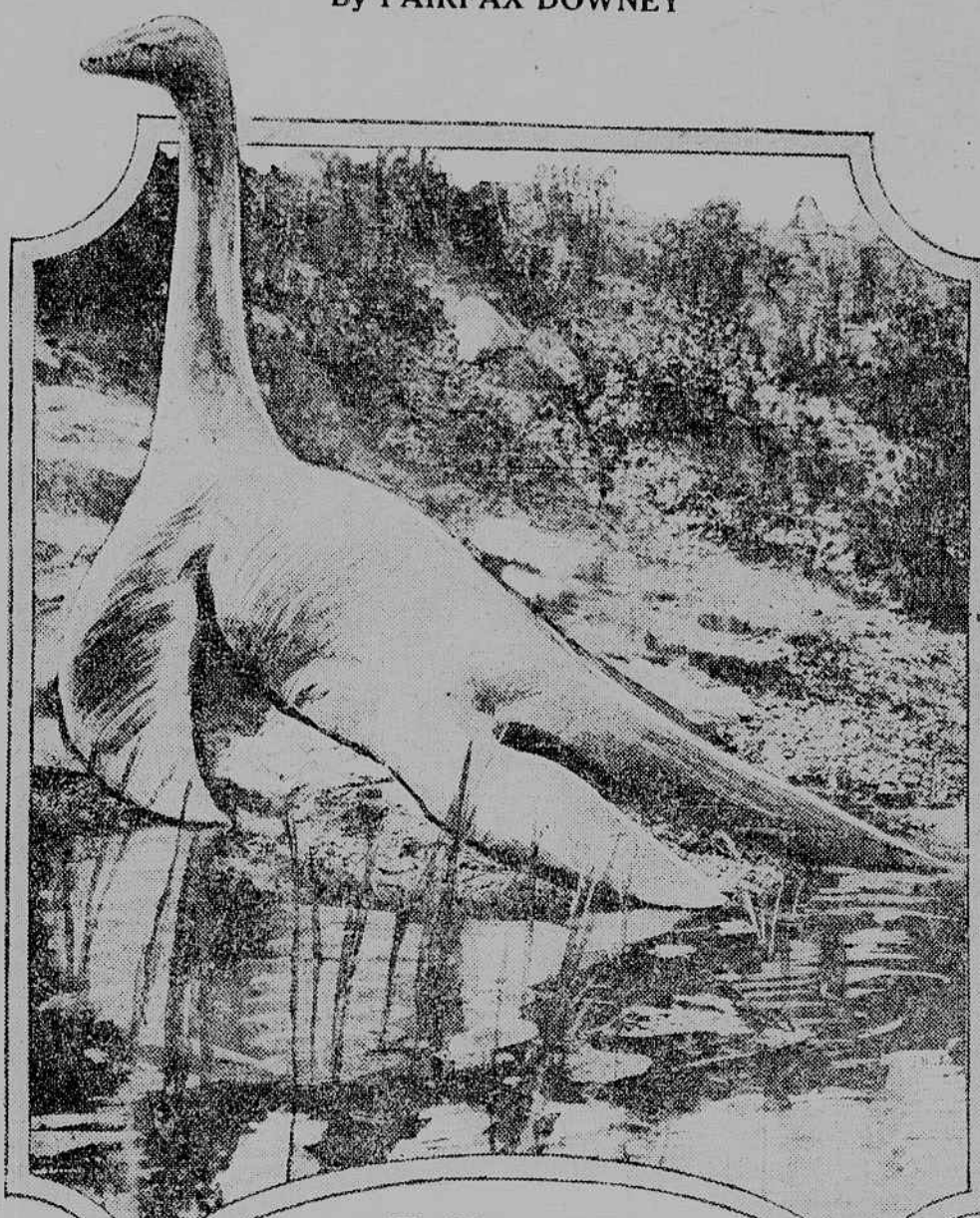
By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

At all events, there must be in the lake in that region some strange and unusual animal form—at least unknown to the people who have seen it."

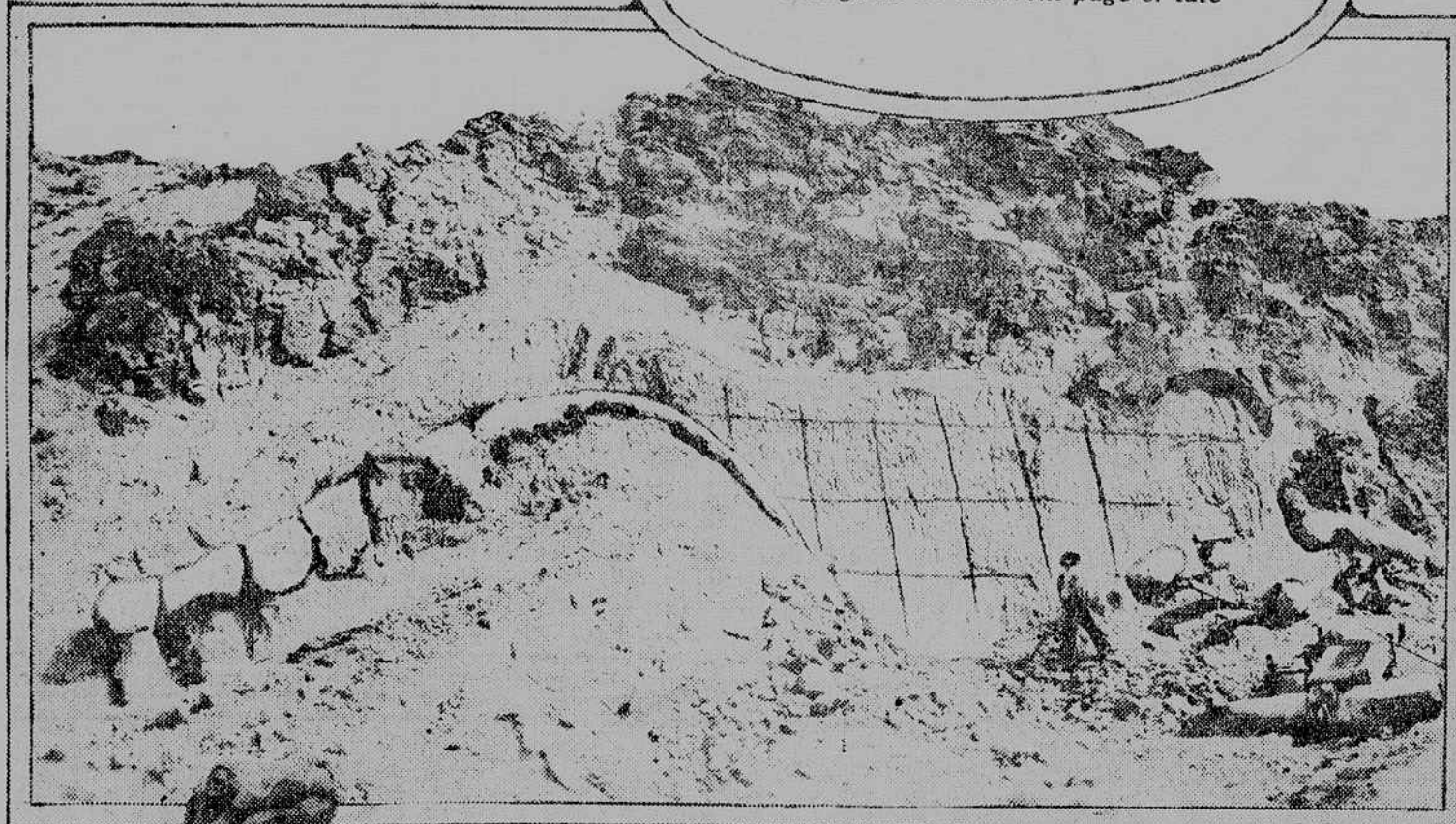
And it must be admitted that in these days, when the young are pried with Noah's arks, picture books, animal crackers and trips to the zoo, it takes a mighty unusual animal to get by unrecognized.

It was Carl Hagenbeck who wrote of reports received by him as to the existence of an immense and wholly unknown animal said to inhabit the interior of Rhodesia. He quoted native stories of "a huge monster, half elephant, half dragon," dwelling in the depths of the great swamps, and suggested that it might be some kind of dinosaur seemingly akin to the brontosaurus. The reports were reproduced in the South African press and created enormous interest, but were received coldly by scientists.

An issue of "The London Sphere" of 1910 continues: "On November 29 publication was given here to a telegram from Bulawayo to the effect that the zoologist of the Rhodesia Museum treated the statement with derision, declaring that nothing of the alleged dinosaur could be gathered from natives. Now, however, 'The Bulawayo Chronicle' publishes an extraordinary story from one of its correspondents, who declares that the zoologist of the Rhodesia Museum is misinformed when he says that the natives have heard of no such monster, and adds that, having investigated the affair, he has met two natives both of whom affirm in the most positive manner that they have actually seen it. Neither of the natives knew the other, but both were shown a number of sketches, some wholly imaginary and others constructed from illustrations of prehistoric reptiles, and both immediately picked one of the sketches as closely resembling the monster they had seen. Each, however, called the attention of the sketcher to the fact that he had omitted to give his picture what from their description must be held to be something in the nature of propulsive flappers. It would seem to possess the head and tail of a crocodile, the horns of a rhinoceros, the neck of a python and the body of a hippopotamus. It is supposed that the creature inhabits a lake between the rivers Lunga and Kafue. The brontosaurus as restored by science is shown, together with the fore and hind leg bones, as erected in an American museum."



The Plesiosaurus, half fish, half mammal, a rumored survivor of whose family has been putting Patagonia on the front page of late



Quarrying dinosaurs out of the rock in Dinosaur National Monument, Utah, where the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh has made many valuable fossil finds. The outline of a prehistoric monster's skeleton in the face of the quarry

But South America undoubtedly is the happy prehistoric hunting ground of the present. How many dark secrets nature still holds inviolate there, deep in her jungles and forests! There man hunts out the unknown, exotic orchids, unclassified fauna, hidden rivers. Thither go the naturalists and the huntsmen to satisfy their ardor. South America has stolen from Africa its charm as the land of mystery. The headlights of the lengthening Cape-to-Cairo railroad begin to pierce the mystic shadows of the Dark Continent. To South America, then, and tally-ho! for a plesiosaurus!

The present quarry is not the first to have called forth the view halloo in South America. According to Professor Clematis Onelli, director of the Zoological Gardens at Buenos Ayres, who is the moving spirit of the expedition now under way, Martin Sheffield, an American friend of his, told him of a strange animal with a swanlike neck swimming in the Esquel region. In 1913 an Englishman reported a similar beast. In 1898 the Norwegian scientist Waag made report of seeing the fresh tracks of a very large animal in the Santa Cruz territory, and corroboration came later from settlers.

Speaking of the crocodile branch of the reptiles of the mesozoic period, H. G. Wells in his "Outline of History" writes: "The plesiosaurs and the ichthyosaurs were two groups which have left no living representative; they were huge reptiles returning to a whalelike life in the sea. Plesiosaurs, one of the largest of the plesiosaurs, measured thirty feet from snout to tail tip—of which half was neck."

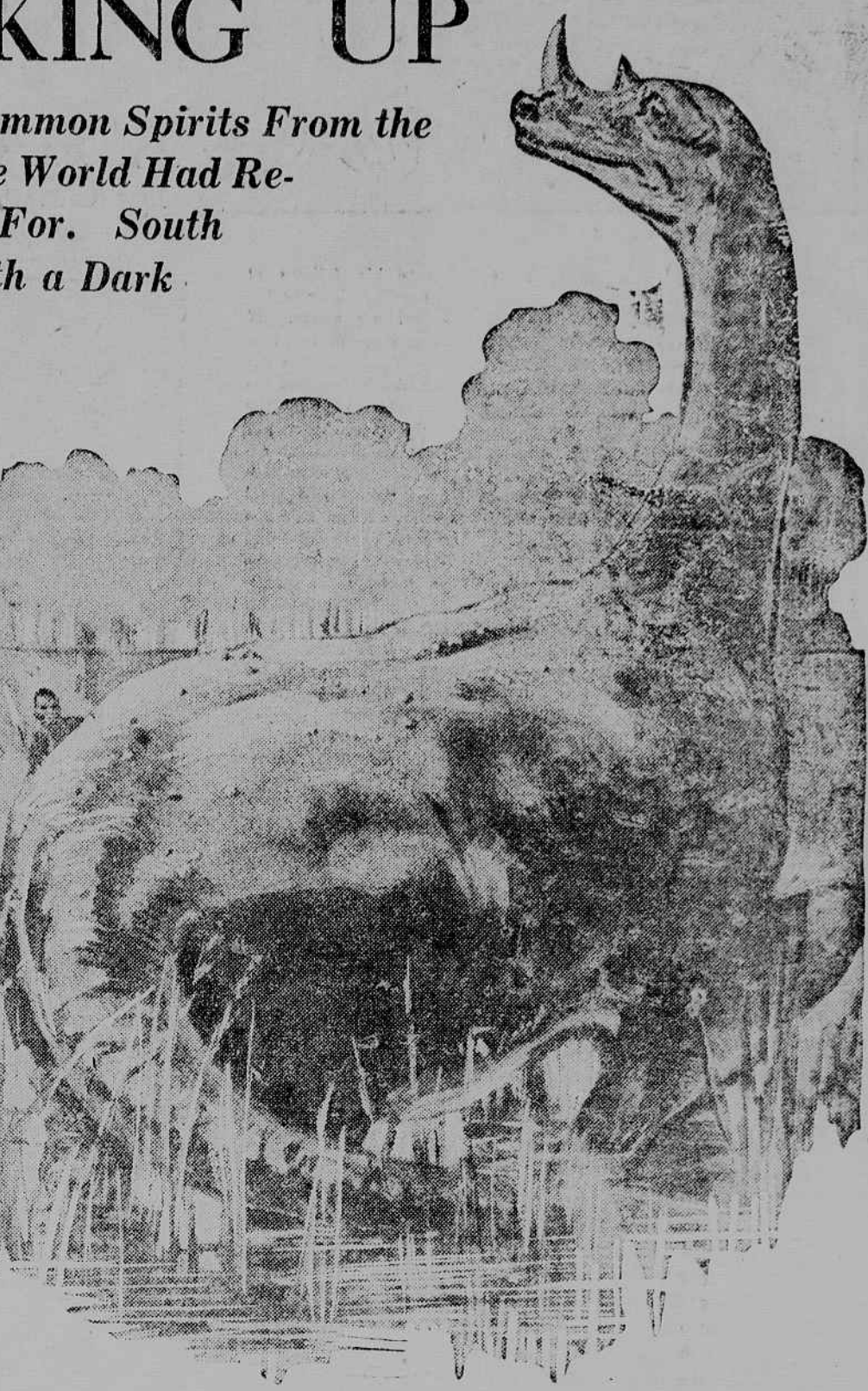
Then Mr. Wells relates an astounding catastrophe that befell the "Record of the Rocks," that prehistoric history reference book. Some-

body or something, it appears, took the "volume" succeeding the mesozoic period from the "circulating library" and never returned it. It's gone and the library has no duplicate. Vide "The Outline."

"This great period of mesozoic life, this second volume in the book of life, is indeed an amazing story of the reptilian life proliferating and developing. But the most striking thing of all the story remains to be told. Right up to the latest mesozoic rocks we find all these reptilian orders we have enumerated still flourishing unchallenged. There is no hint of an enemy or competitor to them in the relics we find of their world. Then the record is broken. We do not know how long a time the break represents; many pages may be missing here, pages that may represent some great cataclysmic climatic change. When next we find abundant traces of the land plants and the land animals of the earth this great multitude of reptile species had gone. For the most part they have left no descendants. They have been 'wiped out.' The pterodactyls have gone absolutely; of the plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs none is alive; the mesosaurs have gone. . . . A new kind of life is in possession of the world."

"This apparently abrupt ending up of the prehistoric is beyond all question the most striking revolution in the whole history of the earth before the coming of mankind."

At the writing of the above, of course, those humble human combinations of Nimrod and Prometheus, firing the imagination of man, had not hunted through the Andes and made their attempt to enroll for Patagonia deathless fame. So far as Mr. Wells or anybody else knew, the plesiosaurs had been



And This One May Be in Africa

"A huge monster, half dragon, half elephant," has been periodically reported in Rhodesia. Two natives (sober) and unknown to each other, claimed to have seen it and agreed as to the description, which has many characteristics of the prehistoric brontosaurus. The above drawing appeared in "The London Sphere" when the monster was first reported, twelve years ago

"wiped out." But there is that great gap to reckon with. It must now be admitted that in the case of the plesiosaurs "no news is good news." Patagonia, where anthropology declares may be found the tallest of mankind, also may furnish some extra large sizes in animals.

Such a discovery had not gone unforeseen. Quite a few years ago this was written:

"One great flat creature like a writhing, palpitating mat of black greasy leather flopped its way slowly to the lake. Here and there high serpent heads projected out of the water, cutting swiftly through it with a little column of foam in front and a long single wake behind, rising and falling in graceful undulations as they went. It was not until one of these creatures wriggled on a sand bank within a few hundred yards of us and exposed a barrel-shaped body behind the long serpent neck that Challenger and Summerlee, who had joined us, broke out into their duet of wonder and admiration, 'Plesiosaurs! A fresh water plesiosaurs!'"

That is from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel "The Lost World," an imaginative tale of the adventures of a band of explorers who ventured upon an isolated and elevated plateau at the headwaters of the Amazon River, where prehistoric life still flourished. The fair land of Patagonia, by the way, is just such a plateau. The gorgeous, fantastic book now is out of print, but sufficient copies exist to award to Sir Arthur, if a plesiosaurus is found in Patagonia, a reputation for intuition and deduction that must go unrivalled through the ages, except for his own Sherlock Holmes.

As one of Sir Arthur's characters declared of prehistoric animals: "They can still be found with all their hideous and formidable characteristics if one has but the energy and hardihood to seek their haunts."

Attaining the great plateau after hardships and being marooned by the chopping away of their tree bridge by a treacherous guide, the valiant Englishmen, the story relates, were not long in sighting five iguanodons, grazing, the young ones as large as elephants. These creatures were engaged in feeding on tree foliage, like so many celery tops.

The explorers were led to their next adventure with the prehistoric by a strange low gabbling and whistling sound "which filled the air with a constant clamor." They cautiously gazed into a great volcanic hole-swamp and this was the strange sight that met their eyes:

"It was a weird place in itself, but its occupants made it seem like a scene from the Seven Circles of Dante. The place was a rookery of Pterodactyls. There were hundreds of them congregated within view. All the bottom area around the water edge was alive with the young ones and with hideous mothers brooding upon their leathery yellow eggs. From this crawling mass of obscure reptile life came the shocking clamor which filled the air and the mephitic, horrible and musty odor which turned us sick. But above, perched each upon its own stone, tall, gray and withered, more like dead and dried specimens than active living creatures, sat the horrible males, absolutely motionless save for the rolling of their red eyes or an occasional snapping on their rat-trap beaks as a dragon fly went past them. Their huge, membranous wings were closed by folding their forearms, so that they sat like gigantic old women,

wrapped in hideous, web-colored shawls and with their ferocious heads protruding above them."

The watchers had the misfortune to alarm the pterodactyls, which attacked them so ferociously they were only saved by a flight into the forest. And after the apparition within their barricade that night of the bloody jaws of a megalosaurus, which was routed only by fire, one of the travellers observed:

"It was surely well for man that he came late in the order of creation."

That sentiment was echoed later when one of the explorers was pursued and saw behind him a "broad, squat, toad-like face. His ferocious cry and the horrid energy of his pursuit both assured me that this was surely one of the great flesh-eating dinosaurs, the most terrible beasts which have ever walked this earth. As the huge beast loomed along, it dropped forward upon its fore paws and put its nose to the ground every two hundred yards or so. It was smelling out my trail."

The quarry had the good fortune to fall into an animal trap where the dinosaur was reluctant to follow, so after spending the night among decaying carcasses, impaled on a sharpened stake, the hero was delivered.

After a terrific battle with ape-men, whose habit it was to hurl their captives from a cliff upon pointed bamboo trees, the Englishmen conquered by the might of their rifles and descended from the plateau. Then they returned to civilization, carrying with them a young pterodactyl to prove their words.

If Conan Doyle's vivid word pictures or the skeletons in museums are not enough to reconstruct for your imagination the monstrous creatures of millions of years ago, you may visit the marvelous park on the Hagenbeck estate near Hamburg, Germany. There, sculptured in cement to a life scale, as shown in the accompanying illustrations, stand the great beasts of prehistory, our friend the plesiosaurus being among those prominently present. These models represent almost the only beasts which the late Carl Hagenbeck, famous collector of animals, did not capture for zoos and circuses, and they escaped him only because he believed them all to have died ages ago. If he had only gone to Patagonia!

Since he could not snare them, Hagenbeck caused the mesozoic creatures to be modeled in natural attitudes throughout his park. What a frightful shock, as time whizzed backward in its flight, a stroll by night in that park would give a stranger!

Hagenbeck's collection of live animals and German zoos suffered severe depletion during the war when the inmates were served up as rations. But the cement statues of the animals of the past still survive and were not broken up to be made into concrete machine gun "pill boxes."

But to return to the alleged alive plesiosaurus. We may soon have word of it. Dr. Hornaday thinks it possible that the expedition may be carrying wireless and radio equipment and that bulletins may be sent back from time to time. If such is the case, almost any time now radio receivers throughout the country may relay, mingled with broadcast fragments of grand opera, sermons, concerts and bedtime stories, the exciting news of the chase and perhaps the capture of the last of the plesiosaurs.